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Cuban guerrillas to

topple Castro

This is the first of two stories on the growing paramilitary movement among Cubans in Florida, whose aim is the armed overthrow of Fidel Castro's Communist regime.

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Chicago Tribune Press Service

MIAMI—Almost two miles down the bumpy dirt road that leads into the swampy wilderness, past the armed sentry posted at the front gate, grown men play war in preparation for the real thing.

Set against a backdrop of jungle brush, once a week they don combat fatigues and pick up rifles and run and shoot and sweat and crawl, at home in the mud and tall grass.

There is no other way, say the weekend guerrillas, if they are to overthrow Fidel Castro.

"We are preparing for the day we invade Cuba," said Jorge Gonzalez, the stocky, chain-smoking commander of the isolated outpost. "Of course, we cannot say when that day will be, but it will be sooner than most think."

DESPITE LONG odds and years of futile plotting, the thought of forcibly overthrowing Castro still grips the more militant among Miami's large Cuban exile community. They are a relatively small group of die-hards who have never given up on the dream of returning to their homeland in triumph.

After years of relative dormancy, their number is growing again, a resurgence exemplified by this hidden camp in the Florida Everglades. Twenty years after the CIA-led Bay of Pigs invasion ended in disaster, some exiles here are re-arming and carrying out a clandestine war against the island's communist regime.

In conversations with exiles, law enforcement officials, and other observers, the following developments have emerged:

- At least five Cuban paramilitary training camps have sprung up in the Everglades in Dade County in the last year, and a half-dozen have materialized in other parts of Florida. Activities at the heavily guarded outposts, which are isolated and on private property, have remained within the law, authorities say.

- One group, Alpha 66, has announced it is infiltrating teams of agents into

Cuba to organize cells of resistance and commit sabotage. Seven Alpha members on a boat carrying plastic explosives were arrested by United States authorities in January as they prepared to leave Key West.

- Nicaraguan supporters of assassinated former dictator Anastasio Somoza trained with Cuban exiles in the Everglades, and authorities are investigating charges that some wealthy Salvadoran exiles in Miami are financing Cuban groups in exchange for men trained to form right-wing "death squads" in El Salvador.

- The stepped-up activity has been bolstered by last year's influx of Cuban refugees to the Miami area. Recruited off the streets and through advertisements broadcast on Spanish-language radio stations, the newcomers have propped up what some regarded as a sagging anti-Castro movement. In some cases, the refugees were sponsored directly out of federal resettlement camps by the same exile organizations they would later join.

Only a small percentage of the Miami area's estimated 800,000 Cubans are involved in paramilitary training and other extremist activities — perhaps as few as 500, authorities believe.

Despite reports that some advisers to President Reagan have urged the unleashing of anti-Castro groups, exile leaders say they have received no encouragement from the new administration.

But anti-Castro activists have been elated at what is seen as a firm new stand in Washington against Castro and communism.

"At least the Reagan administration has publicly acknowledged that communist Cuba is the enemy of the United States," said Andres Nazario Sargen, head of Alpha 66. But Nazario and other exile leaders deny they are backed by the CIA, which armed and trained hundreds of exiles and supported their raids against the island until the late 1960s.

ALTHOUGH CUBA has repeatedly charged that the U.S. government is still supporting activities by anti-Castro exiles and has sought a crackdown on the groups, State Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials say U.S. policy toward the exile groups is one of strict enforcement of the Neutrality Act and antiterrorism laws.

Authorities cite the mid-January arrests of the seven Alpha 66 members near Key West as proof of U.S. efforts to curb illegal exile activities. The seven men were charged with weapons infractions and violations of the Neutrality Act after they told officials they were embarking on a mission to Cuba. Six were recently arrived Cuban refugees.

Alpha says three other Alpha members — all new refugees — have been arrested in recent weeks by Cuban authorities while carrying out missions on the island.

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